

HEPATITIS C: COINFECTION

Arizona Department of Corrections
Health Service Bureau

Inmate Wellness Program
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If you are infected with hepatitis C and HIV, it is known as *co-infection*. These two illnesses are very different, so it is important that you learn about both of them.

HIV Basics

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It is spread mainly through the blood and sexual contact. You can have HIV and feel healthy. Over many years the virus may weaken your immune system, making it hard for your body to fight off dangerous infections.

There are many treatments to help people with HIV. As a result, many people with HIV are living much longer and healthier lives than before. Even so, there is still no cure for HIV infection.

The Effects of HIV

HIV effects your whole immune system, including your body's ability to fight off hepatitis C. As a result, you might develop a worse case of hepatitis C than someone who doesn't have HIV.

Effects on Treatment

HIV and hepatitis C can be successfully treated in co-infected people. It is important to discuss treatment options with your provider, for two reasons: some HIV treatments may cause damage to your liver, and having HIV may worsen the side effects of some medications taken for hepatitis C.

Keeping Healthy

The best way to keep your co-infection from becoming a serious health problem is to keep yourself and your liver healthy by following these guidelines:

- Don't use drugs, drink alcohol, or have unsafe sex. Remember that drugs and alcohol can make your illness worse.

Having unsafe sex can give HIV and hepatitis C to others.

- Talk to your doctor about getting vaccinated to protect you from getting hepatitis A and B.
- Avoid taking medicines or vitamins that might cause more damage to your liver.
- Don't take anything without first checking with the health care staff.
- Stop smoking.

What else can I do if I have HIV and hepatitis C co-infection?

Having HIV or hepatitis C alone is difficult enough. Finding out that you have both at the same time might seem overwhelming. Here are some things that can help:

- Respect your body. Eat healthy food, drink plenty of water, and get adequate rest. Try to exercise every day.
- Do not drink alcohol. Alcohol weakens your immune system and damages your liver even when you are healthy.
- Stay informed. HIV and hepatitis C are two of the most important medical issues today.

Follow your doctor's advice. Follow all instructions you get from your doctor, and ask if you don't understand. Try to keep all of your appointments. Fill out an HNR immediately if you have any problems.